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# AN CAN ONLY DO HIS BEST

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

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# A MAN CAN ONLY DO HIS BEST

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# A MAN CAN ONLY DO HIS BEST

## A FANTASTIC COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

KENNETH SAWYER GOODMAN

CHICAGO
THE STAGE GUILD
MCMXV

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NOTICE: Application for permission to perform this play in the United States should be made to The Stage Guild, Railway Exchange Building, Chicago; and application for permission to perform it elsewhere should be made to Mr. B. Iden Payne, The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, England. No performance of it may take place without consent of the owners of the acting rights.

MAY 20 1915

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A MAN CAN ONLY DO HIS BEST was first produced under the direction of Mr. B. Iden Payne at The Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, England, July 6, 1914, with the following caste:

GILLES, A Mountebank....Wallace Evennett
DOCTOR FUNUSTASIUS LABULGOBULUS,
A Quack.....Christian Morrow
CAPTAIN PASULI,
A Highwayman.....Ernest C. Cassel
THE MAYOR.....William Dexter
A GENDARME.....Ronan Sweeney
ANOTHER GENDARME.....Norman Walker
SIMONETTA, The Mayor's Wife...Edith Smith
JULIETTA, the Keeper of
a Lodging house.....Frances Waring

# A MAN CAN ONLY DO HIS BEST

*The Scene is an attic room in* JULIETTA'S *house. At the back is a door which gives upon the stair landing. There is a door at the left opening into a smaller room, which is supposed to have a window overlooking the street. At the right is a table upon which is a tray covered with a napkin. There are two chairs near the table and the* DOCTOR'S *cot-bed stands against the back wall. There is no other furniture. As the curtain rises, the* DOCTOR *is tugging at his neckcloth before a cracked mirror. He is a large elderly man with long hair and beard, and wears a long, bottle-green great-coat with wide skirts, and a pair of large green spectacles.* GILLES, *a smaller and much younger man, lounges against the frame of the doorway at the left, strumming upon a battered guitar. He wears a loose-fitting coat of soiled white satin, with wide pantaloons of the same material. He has a wide and wilted ruffle around his neck, and a small black skull cap upon his head.*

*The Time is a winter morning, about 1720.*

THE DOCTOR. [*muttering*] Imbecile! Fool! Wooden-head!

GILLES. Good morning, doctor! You're out of sorts?

THE DOCTOR. I'm empty as a church on Easter Monday.

GILLES. Try a little of your own famous elixir of what's-its-name. Fifty bottles of it on the shelf—cures all ills of the feet, head, skin, stomach, and spirit; price, fivepence!

THE DOCTOR. [*turning indignantly*] Do you want me to *poison* myself?

GILLES. [*pointing to the table*] I see but one alternative.

THE DOCTOR. Have you looked under that napkin?

GILLES. Not—not another magoozalum?

THE DOCTOR. No, not another. It is, I believe, the same, the identical fish!

GILLES. [*drawing up a chair, and lifting the napkin*] It hath, indeed, the same odor of antiquity; the same air of mystery and fatigue.

[GILLES *sits down and lays the guitar beside the tray.*]

THE DOCTOR. I positively can't bear it! [*He starts for the door.*]

GILLES. Where on earth are you going?

THE DOCTOR. [*turning just as he reaches the door*] To stand in front of the cook-shops; to smell the fried meat and black coffee. Me! Me! A man of science! A graduate of the University of Bologna!

GILLES. [*pushing back his chair*] Well, you can thank yourself and your blessed elixir. *I'd* never have gotten myself bottled up in this god-forsaken town, like a what's-its-name in a something-or-other.

THE DOCTOR. [*advancing angrily on* GILLES] Did *I* know the king would take it into his head to march an army between us and the frontier? Did *I* know this fool of a commandant and this idiot of a mayor would declare this twopenny town in a state of siege, when a cow could knock their crazy fort to pieces with one slap of her tail? How was *I* to know?

GILLES. [*mildly*] You might have gazed into that thingumajig of yours—that crystal ball that tells the future.

THE DOCTOR. [*walking up and down*] And now we can't leave without a written passport signed by that ass of a Benedetto.

GILLES. Try a spoonful of the elixir.

THE DOCTOR. Don't say elixir to me again! We couldn't sell another bottle. The town's stocked with it.

GILLES. Wait! I've a quotation that fits to a dot. Read it in some kind of a religious

book. "A man can only do his best and go on doing it, and doing it, and doing it."

THE DOCTOR. [*fiercely*] I can tell you one thing a man can't do. He can't go on doing people and doing them and doing them, and then stay in the same place where he did it.

GILLES. But someone might think it cured them of something. I tried a little of it to clean my shoes. You never can tell what things will do these days.

[*He picks up the guitar again.*]

THE DOCTOR. They'll be here to get their money back. They'll have me arrested. They'll call me a quack. Me, a Master of Science! A graduate of the University of Bologna!

GILLES. [*strumming on the guitar*] Heigho! Heigho! A man can only do his best.

THE DOCTOR. I suppose you never even went to the mayor last night. I suppose you never even asked for the passports?

GILLES. [*laying down the guitar suddenly and rising*] There! I knew I was trying to think of something! Of course I went to the mayor. Of course, I asked for the passports.

THE DOCTOR. [*contemptuously*] And, of course, you didn't get them!

GILLES. Wait! Wait!

THE DOCTOR. The mayor wouldn't even see me! Me! Me! A professor of medicine; a bachelor of botany!

GILLES. [*with his hand to his forehead*] If you'd only stop talking! I seem to remember —yes—the mayor was very polite.

THE DOCTOR. [*amazed*] You saw the mayor?

GILLES. Yes, I saw him. He was sitting in a big—what's-the-word? Anyway, whatever a mayor unusally sits in. He had on—a—a—

THE DOCTOR. [*almost beside himself*] Out with it! Did you get the passports?

GILLES. Don't shout at me like that! I can't think! But it's all right. The mayor said he'd send somebody or other around to see me in the morning. I didn't quite understand.

THE DOCTOR. Shades of Plato! Do you *ever* understand *anything?*

GILLES. [*with a shrug*] A man can only do his best—

THE DOCTOR. Don't say that! Don't say that again!

GILLES. And keep right on doing it—

THE DOCTOR. Oh, oh, oh!

[*He puts his fingers in his ears and starts for the door where he runs into* JULIETTA *who enters carrying another tray.*]

GILLES. And doing it and doing it!

JULIETTA. [*to the* DOCTOR] Pig!

THE DOCTOR. [*to* JULIETTA] Bah!
[*He rushes out.*]

GILLES. Forgive the doctor. He's just been called on a case! There's a large fee at stake.

JULIETTA. [*advancing to the centre of the room*] Um! Will he be able to pay my bill?

GILLES. Oh, absolutely!

JULIETTA. I don't believe it. When's he coming back?

GILLES. [*his eye on* JULIETTA'S *tray*] I don't know. Why?

JULIETTA. Because the gentleman on the floor below was drunk last night. He doesn't want anything to eat this morning. I've brought his breakfast up to you. He pays his rent.

GILLES. [*clearing a place on the table*] Alms! Leavings! Charity! You pain me—well, put it down.

[JULIETTA *puts down his tray and* GILLES *pulls up his chair.*]

JULIETTA. [*spitefully*] I wouldn't let that doctor touch it if the skin of his belly was flapping against his backbone.

GILLES. [*sitting down and examining the new breakfast*] Um! Ah! This pickled stuff looks excellent. You're a very charming woman.

JULIETTA. Are you trying to flatter me?

GILLES. [*his mouth full*] No, upon my honor, I've always said so! To the mayor, to the commandant, to Captain Pasuli, to all my friends.

JULIETTA. [*somewhat softened*] But about that little bill of mine?

GILLES. Why speak of money when we are only just beginning to understand each other? Do you suspect me of baseness?

JULIETTA. [*dubiously*] But I can't let sentiment slit my purse.

GILLES. [*gesticulating with his spoon*] Enough! You've blighted the bud! You've brushed the gold from the butterfly's wings.

JULIETTA. Oh, Mr. Gilles, how can you say it? I'm that kind-hearted I wouldn't step on a cockroach!

GILLES. [*with a grand air*] It's better as it is. My family would seriously object to my engaging myself to a person who keeps a lodging-house.

JULIETTA. Oh, please, please forget about the money!

GILLES. We won't discuss it. [*There is a brisk knock at the door.*] There! It's my friend, Captain Pasuli. Come in! Come in!

[*The door opens and* A GENDARME *enters.*]

JULIETTA. It's the police! The police in my house! Oh, Saint Stephen! Oh, Saint Peter of Padua!

GILLES. [*getting to his legs and dropping his spoon*] Wait! Wait!

THE GENDARME. Are you Mr. Gilles?

GILLES. Let me explain!

THE GENDARME. [*in a louder voice*] Are you Mr. Gilles?

JULIETTA. [*wringing her hands*] Yes, yes! He'll go quietly. Oh, Saint Mary and Saint Christopher! To think of such a common, low thing happening in my own house.

THE GENDARME. [*saluting*] Mr. Gilles, these are your passports. Yourself and two other persons; one male and one female. You forgot to mention the names. The mayor trusts to your discretion. Good-day!

[*He salutes and goes out.*]

GILLES. [*to* JULIETTA] There! What did I tell you? You needn't have kicked up such a row!

JULIETTA. [*still in doubt*] Then you're not arrested?

GILLES. [*throwing out his chest*] Arrested? Me? Certainly not! I'm a person of importance. Passports sent me by special what-you-may-call-him.

JULIETTA. [*acidly*] So you're planning to leave, are you?

GILLES. [*walking up and down*] I? Who? We? Yes, yes of course, we're planning to leave. Immediately—this afternoon. Yes, we're planning to leave. Let me think!

JULIETTA. [*slowly*] I'd like to see the color of your money first.

GILLES. [*turning on her*] I felt it in my spine! There's a common mercenary streak in you!

JULIETTA. Who's the female person mentioned in the passport?

GILLES. So that's your tune, is it?

JULIETTA. Yes, that's my tune. Out with it. Who is she?

GILLES. [*his hand to his forehead*] Confound it all, how should I know? Oh, my poor head! Yes, yes! I asked for passports; that's plural, you know; means more than one. "How many?" said the mayor. "One or two beside your own?" I couldn't seem to remember. I wanted to be on the safe side; so I said, "Two." "Male or female?" said the mayor. I wanted to be on the safe side again; so I said, "One of each."

JULIETTA. [*stamping her foot*] You're running away without paying me. You're running away with another woman.

GILLES. I swear to you!

JULIETTA. You are?

GILLES. I'm not.

JULIETTA. Arson, that's what it is. I'm going to the mayor's office. I'm going to have your passports cancelled. I'm going to show you what's what, and what isn't.

GILLES. [*getting between* JULIETTA *and the door*] Stop! You mustn't do that! Wait! I've almost thought of something. Oh, my head, my head!

JULIETTA. [*beginning to whimper*] And you made me love you—and you made out that you lalub—loved me, and now you'll go to jail for it. That's where you'll go!

GILLES. Shut your mouth, can't you? And let me think! Ah, ha, ha! I have it now! I've known it all along. It only just slipped away from me. There! The very thing! What do you say to that, eh? What do you say to that?

JULIETTA. What do I say to what?

GILLES. [*triumphantly*] To going with me, of course? You're the female person mentioned in the passport. Romance! An elopement! How does that strike you?

JULIETTA. I vow and declare I never did such a thing in my life, nor my mother before me!

GILLES. Then it's time to begin.

JULIETTA. Oh, Mr. Gilles, you've gone and made my poor heart flutter, like I'd just run up four flights of stairs.

GILLES. [*eagerly*] Then run down four flights and sell the house! Pack a what's-its-name! Get all the money you have, and a travelling carriage, and a cold lunch and your winter underclothes and a pair of horses. We're going as soon as the doctor gets back.

[*There is another knock at the door*] There he is now! Run along, I tell you, like a good little sweetheart, [*aside*] before I brain you with a chair!

PASULI. [*outside*] What, ho! Friend Gilles!

GILLES. [*somewhat taken aback*] It's the captain. It's Captain Pasuli. He's a very distinguished person.

[CAPTAIN PASULI *enters. He is a tall dark man with a long black moustache. He wears a sort of a military uniform and high boots.*]

PASULI. Odds fish-hooks, friend Gilles, but I'm delighted to see you!

[*He shakes* GILLES *by the hand violently.* GILLES *motions behind his back for* JULIETTA *to go. She hesitates a moment and then scuttles out like a frightened hen.*]

PASULI. [*looking after her*] Bones of Mahomet! Such a face!

GILLES. [*in a whisper*] Exactly! It would sour the wine if she only looked at the cask. But she's my landlady. I'm under some—ahem —obligations to her.

PASULI. [*with affected amazement*] Don't tell me that you're temporarily short of ready money?

GILLES. No, not temporarily. I'm afraid the affliction is chronic.

PASULI. [*genially*] Faith of a soldier! I can't let this go on! My dear friend, why didn't you call on me? My purse is always open.

GILLES. I—well, if you could manage to spare a few crowns.

PASULI. [*feeling for his purse*] A few hundred if you like!

GILLES. [*overcome*] A few hundred? Oh, no, no! I wouldn't think of such a thing!

PASULI. [*slapping his pockets*] My purse! That's odd! I must have left it at my lodgings. You don't happen to have any snuff about you?

GILLES. [*offering his own snuff-box*] There's only a little left, I—

PASULI. Don't apologize.
[*He pockets the box of snuff and grasps* GILLES *by the hand again.*]

GILLES. You—you are really too good!

PASULI. Your gratitude touches me. I may some day give you a chance to do me some slight service in return.

GILLES. Oh, Captain Pasuli, you have only to command me.

PASULI. [*letting go of* GILLES'S *hand and slapping him on the back*] Of course! Of course! I said to myself only yesterday: "Pasuli," I said, "this Gilles is the devil of a fellow. One fellow in a thousand. Just the sort of fellow to stand by you in a pinch." I was right. I won't forget your offer. By the Bones of the Prophet, I will *never* forget your promise.

GILLES. I—I hope I am—

PASULI. [*interrupting as if he had suddenly remembered something*] Enough! Listen! I've a bit of news for you. The duchess is in love with you! The duchess herself!

GILLES. The *duchess* in love with *me?* But *I* don't know any duchess. The duchess of what?

PASULI. [*looking cautiously toward the door*] Hush! You remember the lady I pointed out to you in front of the coffee-house—the beautiful lady with the auburn hair?

GILLES. But *that* was Madame Simonetta, the mayor's wife.

PASULI. Not so loud! It's most mysterious. Her grace and the mayor are involved in a political intrigue of a most delicate nature. She's been obliged for reasons of state to pass for his wife.

GILLES. [*completely puzzled*] That's very singular!

PASULI. [*preening himself*] I hinted to you the other day that I myself am more than a mere soldier of fortune. You must have divined that you were in the presence of—of a personage. Well, sir, I may as well tell you at once that you see before you no less a person than a count of the Holy Roman Empire, a secret emissary of his Holiness the Pope, a member of the Order of Jerusalem.

[GILLES *starts to rise, awestruck.*]

Don't rise! Any one whom her grace favors with her distinguished affections at once becomes the equal of the nobility.

GILLES. And is her grace *really* in love with me?

PASULI. Madly! She's outside on the landing at this moment.

GILLES. What! Her grace on *my* landing!

[*He makes for the door.*]

PASULI. No, no! Don't open the door. Go into the other room, and don't come out till I call you.

GILLES. But—but—I say—

PASULI. Don't on any account let her know what I've told you. She'll probably pretend she's merely come to ask you to do her some little service.

GILLES. I say, you might give me time to slip on a clean what's-its-name.

PASULI. Trust me!

[GILLES *goes into the other room.* PASULI *follows him to the door and shuts it.*]

Bah! Shrimp!

[*He tiptoes to the other door and opens it.* SIMONETTA *enters.*]

SIMONETTA. Has he gone into the other room?

PASULI. Yes.

[*He seizes her hands and kisses her.*]

SIMONETTA. Take care! He might be listening! You *must* tell me what to do next!

PASULI. [*releasing her*] Body of Saint Joseph! Have you forgotten what I told you to say? Weren't you listening at the keyhole?

SIMONETTA. [*rather stupidly*] I heard you tell the little clown that I was a duchess and that I was madly in love with him, but I didn't hear you say a word about the passports.

PASULI. [*disgusted*] Upon my soul, did you expect me to ask him point-blank for his passports and—

SIMONETTA. Don't be harsh with me! I'll do all I can. I've always done everything you asked. [*She begins to whimper.*]

PASULI. In the name of heaven, Simonetta, don't lose your head. Everything depends on your keeping your wits about you.

SIMONETTA. How do I know I ought to trust you? How do I know you're a count of the Holy Roman Empire?

PASULI. [*taking her hand and patting it*] There, there, there, forgive me! Trust me! Beloved, adorable, incomparable lady! There, there, there! Trust your own Ferdinand.

SIMONETTA. [*drawing away*] How do I know you'll make a grand lady of me? How do I know you'll return the money I've stolen from my husband?

PASULI. [*with an assumption of injured dignity*] Borrowed—secretly borrowed. Upon my honor as a Knight of Jerusalem, every farthing shall be returned.

[*He tries to embrace her again.*]

SIMONETTA. [*pointing to the door of the inner room*] No, no! He might see us.

PASULI. True! The little clown! We'll have him in. Remember your story.

SIMONETTA. [*dabbing her eyes*] I—I won't forget it!

PASULI. [*throwing open the inner door*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! [GILLES *enters dressed in a clean ruff. He makes an exaggerated bow to* SIMONETTA, *who at once begins to flirt with him rather clumsily.*]

PASULI. [*with a grand flourish*] Madame, this is the gentleman of whom I've so often spoken.

SIMONETTA. [*to* GILLES] I have heard your character and accomplishments praised in the highest terms, sir.

GILLES. Your—your grace does me too much honor!

SIMONETTA. [*shaking her finger at* PASULI] Tut, tut! You naughty man, you've betrayed me. [*To* GILLES.] The count—I mean the captain has been very indiscreet, Mr. Gilles.

PASULI. Upon the honor of my seven uncles, no harm has been done, I assure you.

GILLES. Oh, madame, I swear you may trust me.

SIMONETTA. [*seating herself and rapidly gaining confidence in her own acting*] Heigh-ho! Well, since the cat's out of the bag, we must make the best of it. You may kiss my hand, Mr. Gilles. [*She offers* GILLES *her hand. He falls on his knees and kisses it.*]

GILLES. Oh, your—your—oh, madame!

PASULI. [*impressively*] I even go so far as to say that you might safely trust Mr. Gilles with the casket containing the emperor's jewels.

GILLES. [*amazed*] The casket containing the emperor's jewels?

SIMONETTA. I vow and protest, Mr. Gilles, I don't know what he's talking about.

PASULI. Thunder of Mahomet, your grace! I'm a blunt soldier. Trust your friends completely, that's my motto. Trust them to the death, that's my principle in life.

SIMONETTA. Oh, Lud! I vow you sometimes take my breath away with your rashness.

PASULI. Ah, ha! I have it! An inspiration! Here's the very man! Why not? Why not trust him to deliver the casket to the emperor's agent?

SIMONETTA. But how's Mr. Gilles to leave the town?

PASULI. But if he could?

SIMONETTA. [*clasping her hands*] He would earn my undying gratitude; to say nothing of the emperor's favor.

PASULI. What a pity! What a terrible pity! Bones of Saint George, if he only had that passport!

GILLES. [*rising from his knees*] But—but, your grace, I have a passport. It came this morning.

PASULI. What? You have a passport?

SIMONETTA. Impossible!

PASULI. Incredible!

SIMONETTA. He has a passport!

PASULI. Blood of Saint Joseph, this is a stroke of fortune. I can't believe it!

GILLES. [*producing the passport*] But I'll show it to you!

PASULI. [*taking the passport and examining it*] In the mayor's own handwriting! "Pass Mr. Gilles and two companions, one male and one female." Then, sir, you're not going alone? This puts an entirely new face on the matter.

GILLES. My friend, the doctor of Bologna, and Madame Julietta, my landlady, are going with me.

SIMONETTA. [*haughtily*] I vow, Mr. Gilles, you chose very low companions.

PASULI. Tush! It's a pity! By the toenails of Satan, if we only had those passports ourselves!

SIMONETTA. [*drawing herself up*] Come! You were rash to mention the project at all. We can't think of inconveniencing Mr. Gilles and his friends.

PASULI. [*striding up and down*] And it is so urgent, so important that your grace make your

escape at once now that you know the mayor to be a traitor.

GILLES. The mayor a traitor!

SIMONETTA. Alas, yes. The mayor may betray us at any moment.

PASULI. [*to* GILLES] You understand now, Mr. Gilles, in what a desperate position her grace finds herself.

SIMONETTA. [*in a resigned voice*] Why trouble Mr. Gilles further since he is unable to help us.

GILLES. [*his hand to his forehead*] Wait! Wait a minute! I almost seem to have it. It's only stuck somewhere in the back of my head. Let me think.

PASULI. [*to* SIMONETTA] Didn't I tell your grace that he was the devil of a chap when it came to thinking?

GILLES. Ah, ha! Clear as water! Two passports; one male and one female. I thought of it directly you mentioned the emperor's jewels. One female person! The description fits your grace exactly.

SIMONETTA. [*drawing herself up*] Sir, you presume upon our slight acquaintance.

PASULI. Bones of Saint Christopher, madame, I believe he has struck the right idea.

SIMONETTA. He is grossly familiar.

GILLES. But—but—your grace is a female person.

PASULI. Upon my soul! How devilishly clever! It took a man of brain to think of it! Your grace *is* certainly a female person.

SIMONETTA. [*rising with dignity*] Be that as it may, I have yet to accustom myself to being called so to my face!

PASULI. Doesn't your grace understand? Mr. Gilles is offering to take us with him.

SIMONETTA. I could hardly consider accepting such a service. Even if it were not for disappointing Mr. Gilles's friends.

GILLES. [*kneeling*] Oh, madame, they're not my friends. They are persons of absolutely no account whatever. I can arrange everything. We'll go at once, before the doctor and Julietta come back.

SIMONETTA. [*apparently beginning to give in*] This is all so rash, so unexpected. Oh, lud, Mr. Gilles, I suppose I must put myself entirely in your hands.

[*She goes toward the door.*]

PASULI. Your grace must positively be back in a quarter of an hour.

SIMONETTA. I'll run all the way! Oh, lud, Mr. Gilles, you do have such a way of persuading a woman.

[*She throws* GILLES *a kiss and goes out.* GILLES *stands looking after her, with his hands clasped.*]

PASULI. [*clapping him on the back*] Bones of Saint Stephen, but you're a fortunate dog! Um, ah! I may as well tell you, her husband, the duke, is a very old man, ninety-six his next birthday.

GILLES. Ninety-six his next birthday?

PASULI. And subject to fits. He's apt to pop off any moment.

GILLES. [*delighted*] But she wouldn't. She'd never think of such a thing.

PASULI. [*with an air of conviction*] Stranger things have happened, my friend. The widow of the rich Prince Parchesi married a street-ballad singer only last year. Hush! What's that? [*He listens.*]

GILLES. It's the doctor. I know his step.

PASULI. Ten million devils! What's to be done?

GILLES. Leave him to me. A man can only do his best.

[THE DOCTOR *enters.*]

THE DOCTOR. Well!

GILLES. Well, did you get your breakfast?

THE DOCTOR. [*indignantly*] I did not. I've been to the mayor's office and had the door slammed in my face.

GILLES. You needn't have troubled yourself.

THE DOCTOR. You don't mean to tell me our passports have come?

GILLES. Yes; oh, yes! A man in uniform, a something-or-other in connection with the what's-its-name, brought them. Isn't it too bad, I'm afraid we oughtn't to use them after all.

THE DOCTOR. Not use them?

GILLES. [*glibly*] My friend, Captain Pasuli, tells me it's positively dangerous to stick your nose outside the town.

THE DOCTOR. Dangerous to stick your nose outside the town?

GILLES. The roads are—what's the word—infested—that's it. The roads are infested with thingumbobs and one-thing-or-another.

PASULI. Ahem! Bandits, desperadoes, cut-throats, rabble in the wake of the two armies.

[THE DOCTOR *looks from* PASULI *to* GILLES *in amazement.*]

GILLES. Exactly! Bloodthirsty rabble ready to cut your throat, and slit your purse.

THE DOCTOR. [*taking off his hat and mopping his forehead*] Dear, dear! I'm not very conversant with the ways of bandits. But I'd hardly supposed one ran much risk with an empty purse in one's pocket.

GILLES. They don't take the trouble to find out what's in your pocket, till after they've knocked you on the head.

PASULI. They crucified an old woman the other day because she only had two crowns in her stocking.

GILLES. In that case, think what they'd be apt to do to us.

PASULI. I should say—boiling in oil, at the very least.

THE DOCTOR. Dear, dear! A doctor of the University of Bologna boiled in oil! It would be quite unprecedented.

[*He tries to think it out.*]

PASULI. [*taking up his hat and cloak*] Well, gentlemen, I hope you'll take my advice. Good-day, Mr. Gilles. [*Aside to* GILLES.] I'll run to my lodgings for my sword and pistols.

GILLES. [*aside to* PASULI] Trust me to manage everything.

PASULI. Good-day, gentlemen.

THE DOCTOR. [*absently*] Good-day.

GILLES. Good-day.

[PASULI *goes out.*]

THE DOCTOR. Do you think there's any truth in what your friend says? Boiled in oil—crucified—I don't like the idea at all.

GILLES. A man can only do his best.

THE DOCTOR. Such a position for a bachelor of science! Between a pack of bloodthirsty wolves and a bellowing bull!

GILLES. Do you allude to Madame Julietta as a bellowing bull?

THE DOCTOR. I admit the error in point of sex. I'm merely comparing their dispositions. Four weeks' board and lodgings! She hates me as the devil hates holy water.

GILLES. You're wrong; absolutely wrong!

THE DOCTOR. [*plaintively*] Crucified! And what on earth am I to do about it?

GILLES. [*after a moment's thought*] Um—you might stay where you are and marry Madame Julietta?

THE DOCTOR. [*startled*] Marry her? Preposterous! Why she always looks at me in a queer, passionate sort of way and grinds her teeth if I even speak to her.

GILLES. [*triumphantly*] What did I tell you! That's the way some women are. You're as good as married to her already! Why, sir, when I'm gone she'll positively melt into your arms.

THE DOCTOR. But you! What about you?

GILLES. Never mind me! I can sacrifice myself gladly. What does it matter about me?

THE DOCTOR. Boiled in oil!

GILLES. Crucified!

THE DOCTOR. [*looking around*] It *is* a comfortable house, a very comfortable house. I must think it over.

JULIETTA. [*outside*] Mr. Gilles! Mr. Gilles! Mr. Gilles!

THE DOCTOR. Good God! There she is now.

GILLES. Hush! Not a word till I'm safely out of the way.

JULIETTA. [*entering*] Oh, Mr. Gilles, I'm ready. I'm ready to start. I'm ready to start right away.

GILLES. [*trying to shut her off*] Yes, yes! Certainly! Of course! What did I tell you? She's ready to start right away. There's a woman for you! There's a woman in a thousand! Ready to start—

JULIETTA. [*to* GILLES] I've the money and my portmanteau and a cold lunch in a basket and—

GILLES. [*losing the thread of his idea*] Yes, yes! This is terrible—terrible! I can't seem to think. Damn it, I can't seem to think at all! [*He beats his forehead.*]

THE DOCTOR. What, in the name of Heaven, is the matter with the man?

GILLES. [*beating his head*] A portmanteau! A what-you-may-call-it of cold lunch! There

must be some way out of this. Oh, my poor head! [*There is a knock at the door,* JULIETTA *goes toward it.*]

GILLES. No, no! Don't open it!

[JULIETTA *opens the door, revealing* SIMONETTA, *who comes in with a veil over her face and carrying a box.*]

JULIETTA. Well, I never in my life!

THE DOCTOR. Upon my word!

SIMONETTA. [*coldly*] I did not expect to find you entertaining company, Mr. Gilles.

JULIETTA. [*to* SIMONETTA] I'd have you know this is my own house you're talking in.

SIMONETTA. [*haughtily to* GILLES] Since this lady seems to object to my presence, I shall trouble you no further.

GILLES. [*getting between her and the door*] No, no, no! You mustn't do that! Go—go—go into the other room. You mustn't mind what Julietta says.

SIMONETTA. I vow, sir, your head seems somewhat addled!

[*She goes swiftly into the inner room.* GILLES *shuts the door.*]

JULIETTA. Well, Mr. Gilles, if I do say it that shouldn't, my house has always borne a reputation that I may call lily-white, white as Easter lilies, if I do say it.

GILLES. [*turning on* JULIETTA] May the devil fly off with you and your Easter lilies! Do you want to ruin me! Don't you know a lady of quality when you see one?

JULIETTA. [*in a jealous rage*] A lady of quality? A lady of quality? What would a lady of quality be doing climbing up four flights of stairs to see a—a—a—

GILLES. Be careful what you say!

JULIETTA. A—a—cheap—juggler, a street mountebank, a—a—cheating, grinning, miserable clown, like you!

GILLES. [*to* THE DOCTOR] Didn't I tell you! That's the way she talks to me! That's the gratitude I get for bringing people of distinction to her confounded den of cockroaches.

JULIETTA, Den of cockroaches! Don't I know a common, low woman when I see one?

GILLES. [*with a grand gesture*] You may consider our acquaintance absolutely at an end.

JULIETTA. You'll pay me my money first. You can't run away with your scarlet Queen of Sheba under my very nose.

GILLES. Be still! Can't you? The lady'll hear you.

JULIETTA. Yah! The lady! Who is your lady?

THE DOCTOR. I can tell you who the lady is.

JULIETTA. Well, then, who is she?

GILLES. [*quite beside himself*] For the love of Heaven, be quiet! Can't you? I'll tell you in a moment. Let me think! Oh, my head! My head! I can't seem to remember.

THE DOCTOR. Unless I'm very much mistaken, she is Madame Simonetta, the mayor's wife.

JULIETTA. It's a lie! It's a lie! Let her come out! I won't be fooled in my own house.

GILLES. No, no, no! It *is* Madame Simonetta, the mayor's wife.

JULIETTA. Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one! What's she doing here? Answer me that!

GILLES. Damn it, if you must know, she's here to buy a hundred bottles of the doctor's Elixir of Life.

JULIETTA. Ha, ha! What for? To poison rats in the town hall?

GILLES. A thousand devils! How do I know what she wants it for? The mayor himself sent me a letter. It said—confound it, what did it say?

JULIETTA. Show me the letter.

GILLES. I tore it up.

JULIETTA. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Anything else?

SIMONETTA. [*in the other room*] Oh, Mr. Gilles! Are they gone?

GILLES. There now! See what you've done! You've made me keep her waiting! You've made her angry. Like as not she'll only buy fifty bottles of the Elixir.

SIMONETTA. Mr. Gilles, may I speak with you a moment?

GILLES. Yes, yes. I'm coming, I'm coming! [*He opens the door of the other room and goes in.*]

JULIETTA. [*to* THE DOCTOR] Well, what do you think about that? In my own house, too!

THE DOCTOR. But if it *is* Madame Simonetta, the mayor's wife.

JULIETTA. Madame Fiddle-sticks, the mayor's cook! Don't I know what he's doing? Didn't I catch him just in time? He's trying to run away with that—that—Jezebel of Jerusalem, that hussy—that—

THE DOCTOR. But, perhaps it's all for the best. There—there—let him go, my dearest Julietta, and remember that you still have me.

JULIETTA. [*turning on him*] Your dearest Julietta still has you, has she? You're a fine partner to a fine bird, you are! You're both of one piece. A pair of lying, cheating ragamuffins.

THE DOCTOR. [*backing away from her*] Dear, dear, dear! I can hardly take such language as a sign of affection.

JULIETTA. Affection! Affection! Don't come near me or I'll twist the nose off your face!

THE DOCTOR. Ah! And yet he *did* say that some women take just that way of showing their passion.

JULIETTA. Are you gone stark staring mad? Who said it?

THE DOCTOR. Why, Gilles.

JULIETTA. The viper! That goes to show what he is! I'll have the law on him, that's what I will. I'll have his passports cancelled. I'll have him up for perjury and arson and seduction—that's what I will!

[*She makes for the door.*]

THE DOCTOR. Stop! Stop!

JULIETTA. Don't you get between me and that door! [*She rushes out.*]

THE DOCTOR. [*wringing his hands*] Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Such a position for a man of science.

[GILLES *enters.*]

GILLES. What's the trouble? Where's Julietta?

THE DOCTOR. She's gone to lodge a complaint against us with the mayor. She threatened me with physical violence.

GILLES. [*grasping his hand*] It's exactly as I said. She threatened you, did she? Splendid! She's yours! I congratulate you! She's a magnificent woman.

THE DOCTOR. But—but—I don't know what to do next?

GILLES. Run out and fetch one of those covered contraptions—one of those travelling what-you-may-call-its, with a couple of horses and a postboy!

THE DOCTOR. But—but I don't understand!

GILLES. You don't have to! I'll explain later. [*He shoves* THE DOCTOR *toward the door.*]

THE DOCTOR. Wait—I—

GILLES. Do as I tell you! [*He pushes* THE DOCTOR *out and slams the door.*] I've a head on me, a great head for details!

[SIMONETTA *enters from the inner room.*]

SIMONETTA. Well, what have you done? Where's Captain Pasuli; why isn't he here?

GILLES. He can't be long. I've sent the doctor to fetch a carriage.

SIMONETTA. And your friends? What about your friends?

GILLES. They've agreed to remain behind.

SIMONETTA. Mr. Gilles, you're a marvellous man. You may kiss my hand again—

GILLES. [*falling on his knees*] Oh, madame! Oh, your grace!

SIMONETTA. Oh, fie, sir! You're a bold man —a very naughty, audacious man.

GILLES. [*taking her hand*] Doesn't the poor toad in the grass feel the brightness of the stars? Doesn't he struggle up through the grass-blades a little way from the wet ground and dream all sorts of audacities? Doesn't he feel his heart thump in his side at being an inch or two nearer something that's still a million miles above his head?

SIMONETTA. Oh, lud, but I vow there's less than a foot of space between us, Mr. Gilles. A million miles! You're very poetical, I declare.

GILLES. [*becoming bolder*] Oh, your grace, give me both your hands!

SIMONETTA. [*with a glance at the door*] I vow, sir, you're going quite mad with presumption. Give me the passports. They'll be safer in my bosom.

GILLES. Say that you love me!

SIMONETTA. You ask your reward before you perform your service.

GILLES. Then I *am* to have my reward?

SIMONETTA. Another time, perhaps.

GILLES. [*eagerly*] Yes, yes, yes, another time! In another place! In a great cool garden by a sweet fountain, with a marble what's-its-name, and trees whispering over us, and tall thingumbobs all green and pink and white and spidery gold! Oh, my lady, forgive me!

SIMONETTA. [*impatiently*] Yes, yes, yes! But you're to get me out of this town first.

GILLES. [*jumping up from his knees*] True! Why hasn't Pasuli come? Why hasn't the doctor come back?

SIMONETTA. Run into the other room. Watch at the window till you see the carriage.

GILLES. Oh, madame!

SIMONETTA. There, you may kiss my hands again! [GILLES *kisses her hand, and runs into the inner room.* PASULI *sticks his head in at the other door.*]

SIMONETTA. [*going toward him*] Pasuli!

PASULI. [*in a whisper*] Hush! Did you get the passports?

SIMONETTA. No!

PASULI. [*entering softly and closing the door*] Ten thousand fiends, then we'll have to take him with us after all!

SIMONETTA. We can tie him to a tree as soon as we are out of sight of the sentries.

PASULI. Where is he?

SIMONETTA. Hanging out of the window, like a booby at a fair, watching for the carriage.

PASULI. One kiss then!
[*He embraces her.*]

SIMONETTA. My own Ferdinand!

PASULI. You have the casket with your husband's money?

SIMONETTA. Yes, yes!

PASULI. Another kiss!

SIMONETTA. [*pushing* PASULI *away*] Not now! He'll hear us. No, no! Let me go I tell you! [GILLES *enters in time to see* PASULI *struggling for another kiss.*]

GILLES. Good God!

SIMONETTA. [*to* PASULI] Let me go, I say!
[PASULI *springs back and* GILLES *springs between him and* SIMONETTA.]

GILLES. [*to* PASULI] How dare you! How dare you touch her grace!

SIMONETTA. Now, the fat's in the fire!

GILLES. Don't be alarmed, madame! I'm man enough to protect you against insult.

PASULI. [*blustering*] Why, you miserable little shrimp, I'll break every bone in your carcass.

GILLES. We'll see about that!

SIMONETTA. Don't! Don't! Don't touch him!

PASULI. [*threatening* GILLES] Come on, young fire-eater, hand over those passports.

GILLES. Don't you come a step nearer.

PASULI. Come now, be quick about it.

GILLES. Don't you lay your hands on me!

PASULI. [*firmly*] Toenails of Satan, give me those passports or I'll tear your liver out.
[*He makes a move at* GILLES.]

GILLES. Stand off!
[*He grabs up a chair.*]

PASULI. You will, will you?
[*He runs at* GILLES.]

GILLES. [*striking at him with a chair*] Take that!

SIMONETTA. Our Lady in Heaven!
[PASULI *starts to draw his sword but* GILLES *strikes him again on the head and he falls.*]

SIMONETTA. Oh, Heaven protect us, what have you done!

GILLES. [*dazed*] I don't know! I only meant to—I don't know what I meant to do!

SIMONETTA. [*bending over* PASULI *and feeling his heart*] You've killed him! You've murdered him!

GILLES. [*his hand to his forehead*] Killed him! I can't have killed him! Why I never even killed a mouse! Let me think!

SIMONETTA. Yes, think! Think! Much good it'll do you to think! Don't you know you'll hang for this? Why, in God's name, don't you say something, you fool?

GILLES. [*almost weeping*] Madame, I've killed my friend to protect you and you call me a fool! I—I vow I think you owe me *some* gratitude.

SIMONETTA. Gratitude! Gratitude! Oh, Mary above, he's killed the one man I loved in the world! He speaks of gratitude!

GILLES. The one man you loved in the world? I—I—

SIMONETTA. [*springing up*] Don't touch me! Don't come near me! I'm ruined! I'm ruined, I tell you! You've ruined me between you.

GILLES. [*pulling himself together*] No, madame. Calm yourself. The carriage is in the street, the passports are here in my pocket. I can still take you safely—

SIMONETTA. [*quite forgetting her role of grand lady*] To the gallows—. Do you think I want to die with a mean, low, murdering ragamuffin?

GILLES. Your—your grace! A few moments ago—

SIMONETTA. [*almost shrieking*] Don't call me "your grace." I'm not a duchess. Oh, God, I wish I could tear you limb from limb!

GILLES. Don't say another word! I don't know what this all means, but I know that I loved you. That entails a sort of obligation on a man. What is it you want me to do?

SIMONETTA. I want you to get me out of this. I want you to save me.

GILLES. Let me think! I've something rattling around in the back of my head.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

SIMONETTA. Oh, Mother of Heaven, someone's at the door. Let me hide myself.

GILLES. No. Stay where you are. It's only the doctor.

[THE DOCTOR *enters.*]

THE DOCTOR. Well, the travelling carriage is in the street.

GILLES. [*handing him the passports*] Good! Here are two passports. Take this lady and go at once. She'll give you directions.

THE DOCTOR. But you?

GILLES. I've changed my plans. Look over there. [*He points to* PASULI.]

THE DOCTOR. [*amazed*] It's the captain.

GILLES. Yes, it's the captain. We had a misunderstanding.

THE DOCTOR. [*bending over* PASULI] Why, the man's dead!

GILLES. Yes, he's dead—dead as what's-his-name. I split his thingumajig with that what-do-you-call-it.

THE DOCTOR. Dear, dear! What a position for a bachelor of science, a peaceful practitioner of the art of healing.

SIMONETTA. [*wringing her hands*] We must do something! We must!

GILLES. I've told you what to do.

THE DOCTOR. But, my boy, my poor boy, if we go, you can surely go with us?

GILLES. The lady prefers that I remain behind.

THE DOCTOR. But, you'll hang for it! Don't you know that you'll hang for it?

GILLES. A man can only do his best and keep on doing it and doing it and doing it.

SIMONETTA. [*venomously*] I wouldn't cry quits with you if I could help it till I'd picked every rag of flesh from your bones!

[*She spits at him.*]

GILLES. I regret that you will be denied that satisfaction, madame.

THE DOCTOR. But—but—Gilles—

GILLES. [*fiercely*] Why don't you go!

[SIMONETTA *goes to the door, opens it and starts back in terror.*]

SIMONETTA. Tears of Mary, we're too late!

THE DOCTOR. I hear Madame Julietta! Such a position! Such a position!

SIMONETTA. Oh, God help me! I hear the gendarmes!

GILLES. Hush!

[THE DOCTOR *snatches a cover from the cot and throws it over* PASULI. SIMONETTA *sinks into a chair covering her face.* JULIETTA *enters, followed by two gendarmes.*]

JULIETTA. [*pointing to* GILLES] There he is! There's the villain! Sieze him! I've got a warrant for his arrest. Arson and pillage and false swearing; that's what he's committed, and he owes me four weeks board and lodging.

[THE GENDARMES *step forward.*]

THE FIRST GENDARME. [*to* GILLES] Come along now! Give me your fists!

GILLES. But I want to explain.

THE SECOND GENDARME. You can explain to the magistrate.

[THE MAYOR *enters.*]

JULIETTA. [*triumphantly*] Here's his honor, now! Perhaps he'll tell us what's what and what isn't.

THE MAYOR. [*advancing to the centre of the room*] Mr. Gilles, I understand that this good woman has lodged a serious complaint against you. I understand, furthermore, that you intend to grossly abuse my trust in granting you three passports.

GILLES. Your honor, I can explain everything. It's only stuck somewhere in the back of my head.

THE MAYOR. [*shaking his head*] I hope you can, sir. [*He looks around*]. What's that under the cloth yonder?

[JULIETTA *stoops and pulls the cloth from the body of* PASULI.]

JULIETTA. [*screaming*] Oh, Saint Genevieve and Saint Katharine! In my house! A murder in my house!

THE MAYOR. [*to* GILLES] This is very serious. This comes under the fifth penal enactment. Sir, did you commit this crime?

GILLES. Well, you see—

SIMONETTA. [*lifting her head*] He did! He did! He lies when he says he didn't. I saw it with my own eyes. He killed him with a chair. I'll swear he did it and he'll have to hang for it.

THE MAYOR. My wife! Simonetta! What in Heaven's name are you doing here?

SIMONETTA. [*running to* THE MAYOR *and falling on her knees*] I don't know! I don't know! Take me away! Take me home!

THE MAYOR. [*pompously*] This is very serious, very perplexing. Let me see, um—ah—the fifth penal enactment. Very complicated crime— [PASULI *stirs a little.*]

THE FIRST GENDARME. Why, your honor, the man isn't dead at all!

ALL TOGETHER. Not dead!

THE SECOND GENDARME. [*to* PASULI] Here, you, get up and explain yourself.

THE MAYOR. [*very much incensed*] Yes, sir, get up at once and explain why you're not dead?

PASULI. [*sitting up with his hand to his head*] I refuse to answer any question without the advice of a notary.

THE MAYOR. [*peevishly*] Dear, dear! This complicates matters terribly. This upsets my application of the fifth penal enactment. Can't someone at least tell us who this person is.

THE FIRST GENDARME. Why, your honor, I can tell you! It's the very man we've been looking for. It's the highwayman they sent us a description of from Turin. There's a reward of two hundred crowns for his capture, dead or alive.

SIMONETTA. [*looking at* PASULI *with horror and contempt*] Oh, the miserable dog!

THE MAYOR. [*to* PASULI] Well, sir, what have you got to say?

PASULI. [*sullenly*] I've told you I refuse to answer any questions.

THE MAYOR. Mr. Gilles, I might suggest that you answer for your friend.

GILLES. He's not my friend! Oh, my head! Confound it, let me think.

THE MAYOR. [*taking out a note book*] Remember that anything you say may be used against you.

GILLES. [*as if recounting a scene from a play*] I was eating my breakfast, a piece of fried what's-the-word, never mind, a piece of something-or-other that was fried, fried very brown with melted butter all over it and a green thing-umajig like a little tree stuck in one end.

THE MAYOR. In the name of Truth, sir, don't complicate the evidence with what you were eating.

GILLES. Oh, my poor head! I can't seem to remember. Yes, yes! There was a knock at the door. A lady entered, a very beautiful lady, that lady over there. She came to buy a bottle of the doctor's Elixir of Life.

THE MAYOR. Well, sir, go on.

GILLES. I was folding my napkin.

THE MAYOR. Damn it, sir, I'm not taking testimony about your table manners.

GILLES. Wait, wait! I have it all now. I had just folded my napkin and given her the bottle, when the door flies open and in jumps that man over there, a pistol in each hand.

JULIETTA. Well, of all things!

THE DOCTOR. Upon my word!

THE MAYOR. [*writing in his note-book*] A pistol in each hand.

GILLES. No, I think he had them both in one hand and a sword in the other. I don't seem to remember. Never mind! It's no matter! Perhaps, he had them one in each hand and the sword in his teeth. "Sir," he said, "throw up your hands while I carry off the lady."

THE DOCTOR. I never in my life!

JULIETTA. Upon my word as a Christian!

PASULI [*struggling to get at* GILLES] You little impudent, lying shrimp—you infernal little cur!

THE MAYOR. Gag that man—

[THE GENDARMES *twist a scarf around* PASULI'S *face.*]

GILLES. I looked him between the eyes and I said to myself, "Gilles," I said, "this mustn't

happen." So I hit him over the head with a chair.

ALL TOGETHER. He hit him over the head with a chair.

GILLES. [*with a shrug*] There, you have it.

THE DOCTOR. [*delighted by* GILLES'S *ingenuity*] Well, I'll be —

GILLES. [*delighted at finding himself a hero*] You see it's all very simple after all.

THE MAYOR. And I suppose you claim the reward of the two hundred crowns?

GILLES. Certainly, I claim them.

THE MAYOR. [*shutting his note-book*] Sir, I congratulate you.

JULIETTA. But, what about me?

THE MAYOR. Tush, tush, madame! In recognition of Mr. Gilles's public service I cancel your charges.

JULIETTA. But the four weeks' board and lodging?

GILLES. Mercenary soul!

THE MAYOR. Mr. Gilles has rescued my wife. I engage to pay his account in full.

SIMONETTA. [*without raising her eyes*] Mr. Gilles, I am deeply grateful.

GILLES. [*bowing*] You see, madame, the obligation has been fulfilled after all.

THE DOCTOR. But the passports! How about the passports?

GILLES. I knew there was something still stuck in the back of my head.

THE MAYOR. [*genially*] The passports shall be renewed this instant. Where's a pen and ink?

GILLES. [*to* THE DOCTOR] Ah, ha! What did I tell you? Everything always comes out right. A man can only do his best, and keep right on doing it, and doing it and doing it!

CURTAIN

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